



War of 1812

In the War of 1812, the United States took on the greatest naval power in the world, Great Britain, in a conflict that would have an immense impact on the young country's future. Causes of the war included British attempts to restrict U.S. trade, the Royal Navy's impressment of American seamen and America's desire to expand its territory. The United States suffered many costly defeats at the hands of British, Canadian and Native American troops over the course of the War of 1812, including the capture and burning of the nation's capital, Washington, D.C., in August 1814. Nonetheless, American troops were able to repulse British invasions in New York, Baltimore and New Orleans, boosting national confidence and fostering a new spirit of patriotism. The ratification of the Treaty of Ghent on February 17, 1815, ended the war but left many of the most contentious questions unresolved. Nonetheless, many in the United States celebrated the War of 1812 as a "second war of independence," beginning an era of partisan agreement and national pride.

Contents

[Causes of the War of 1812](#)

[The War of 1812 Breaks Out](#)

[War of 1812: Mixed Results for American Forces](#)

[End of the War of 1812 and its Impact](#)

Causes of the War of 1812

At the outset of the 19th century, Great Britain was locked in a long and bitter conflict with Napoleon Bonaparte's France. In an attempt to cut off supplies from reaching the enemy, both sides attempted to block the United States from trading with the other. In 1807, Britain passed the Orders in Council, which required neutral countries to obtain a license from its authorities before trading with France or French colonies. The Royal Navy also outraged Americans by its practice of impressment, or removing seamen from U.S. merchant vessels and forcing them to serve on behalf of the British.

In 1809, the U.S. Congress repealed Thomas Jefferson's unpopular Embargo Act, which by restricting trade had hurt Americans more than either Britain or France. Its replacement, the Non-Intercourse Act, specifically prohibited trade with Britain and France. It also proved ineffective, and in turn was replaced with a May 1810 bill stating that if either power dropped trade restrictions against the United States, Congress would in turn resume non-intercourse with the opposing power. After Napoleon hinted he would stop restrictions, President James Madison blocked all trade with Britain that November. Meanwhile, new members of Congress elected that year--led by Henry Clay and John C. Calhoun--had begun to agitate for war, based on their indignation over British

violations of maritime rights as well as Britain's encouragement of Native American hostility against American expansion in the West.

The War of 1812 Breaks Out

In the fall of 1811, Indiana's territorial governor William Henry Harrison led U.S. troops to victory in the Battle of Tippecanoe. The defeat convinced many Indians in the Northwest Territory (including the celebrated Shawnee chief Tecumseh) that they needed British support to prevent American settlers from pushing them further out of their lands. Meanwhile, by late 1811 the so-called "War Hawks" in Congress were putting more and more pressure on Madison, and on June 18, 1812, the president signed a declaration of war against Britain. Though Congress ultimately voted for war, both House and Senate were bitterly divided on the issue. Most Western and Southern congressmen supported war, while Federalists (especially New Englanders who relied heavily on trade with Britain) accused war advocates of using the excuse of maritime rights to promote their expansionist agenda.

In order to strike at Great Britain, U.S. forces almost immediately attacked Canada, then a British colony. American officials were overly optimistic about the invasion's success, especially given how underprepared U.S. troops were at the time. On the other side, they faced a well-managed defense coordinated by Sir Isaac Brock, the British soldier and administrator in charge in Upper Canada (modern Ontario). On August 16, 1812, the United States suffered a humiliating defeat after Brock and Tecumseh's forces chased those led by Michigan William Hull across the Canadian border, scaring Hull into surrendering Detroit without any shots fired.

War of 1812: Mixed Results for American Forces

Things looked better for the United States in the West, as Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry's brilliant success in the Battle of Lake Erie in September 1813 placed the Northwest Territory firmly under American control. Harrison was subsequently able to retake Detroit with a victory in the Battle of Thames (in which Tecumseh was killed). Meanwhile, the U.S. navy had been able to score several victories over the Royal Navy in the early months of the war. With the defeat of Napoleon's armies in April 1814, however, Britain was able to turn its full attention to the war effort in North America. As large numbers of troops arrived, British forces raided the Chesapeake Bay and moved in on the U.S. capital, capturing Washington, D.C., on August 24, 1814, and burning government buildings including the Capitol and the White House.

On September 13, 1814, Baltimore's Fort McHenry withstood 25 hours of bombardment by the British Navy. The following morning, the fort's soldiers hoisted an enormous American flag, a sight that inspired Francis Scott Key to write a poem he titled "The Star-Spangled Banner." (Set to the tune of an old English drinking song, it would later be adopted as the U.S. national anthem.) British forces subsequently left the Chesapeake Bay and began gathering their efforts for a campaign against New Orleans.

End of the War of 1812 and its Impact

By that time, peace talks had already begun at Ghent (modern Belgium), and Britain moved for an armistice after the failure of the assault on Baltimore. In the negotiations that followed, the United States gave up its demands to end impressment, while Britain promised to leave Canada's borders unchanged and abandon efforts to create an Indian state in the Northwest. On December 24, 1814, commissioners signed the Treaty of Ghent, which would

be ratified the following February. On January 8, 1815, unaware that peace had been concluded, British forces mounted a major attack on New Orleans, only to meet with defeat at the hands of future U.S. president Andrew Jackson's army. News of the battle boosted sagging U.S. morale and left Americans with the taste of victory, despite the fact that the country had achieved none of its pre-war objectives.

Though the War of 1812 is remembered as a relatively minor conflict in the United States and Britain, it looms large for Canadians and for Native Americans, who see it as a decisive turning point in their losing struggle to govern themselves. In fact, the war had a far-reaching impact in the United States, as the Treaty of Ghent ended decades of bitter partisan infighting in government and ushered in the so-called "Era of Good Feelings." The war also marked the demise of the Federalist Party, which had been accused of being unpatriotic for its antiwar stance, and reinforced a tradition of Anglophobia that had begun during the Revolutionary War. Perhaps most importantly, the war's outcome boosted national self-confidence and encouraged the growing spirit of American expansionism that would shape the better part of the 19th century.

How to Cite this Page:

War of 1812

APA Style

War of 1812. (2013). *The History Channel website*. Retrieved 6:45, March 4, 2013, from <http://www.history.com/topics/war-of-1812>.

Harvard Style

War of 1812. [Internet]. 2013. The History Channel website. Available from: <http://www.history.com/topics/war-of-1812> [Accessed 4 Mar 2013].

MLA Style

"War of 1812." 2013. *The History Channel website*. Mar 4 2013, 6:45 <http://www.history.com/topics/war-of-1812>.

MHRA Style

"War of 1812," *The History Channel website*, 2013, <http://www.history.com/topics/war-of-1812> [accessed Mar 4, 2013].

Chicago Style

"War of 1812," *The History Channel website*, <http://www.history.com/topics/war-of-1812> (accessed Mar 4, 2013).

CBE/CSE Style

War of 1812 [Internet]. The History Channel website; 2013 [cited 2013 Mar 4] Available from: <http://www.history.com/topics/war-of-1812>.

Bluebook Style

War of 1812, <http://www.history.com/topics/war-of-1812> (last visited Mar 4, 2013).

AMA Style

War of 1812. The History Channel website. 2013. Available at: <http://www.history.com/topics/war-of-1812>. Accessed Mar 4, 2013.

This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only.

©1996-2013, A&E Television Networks, All Rights Reserved

